

The power of oneness

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

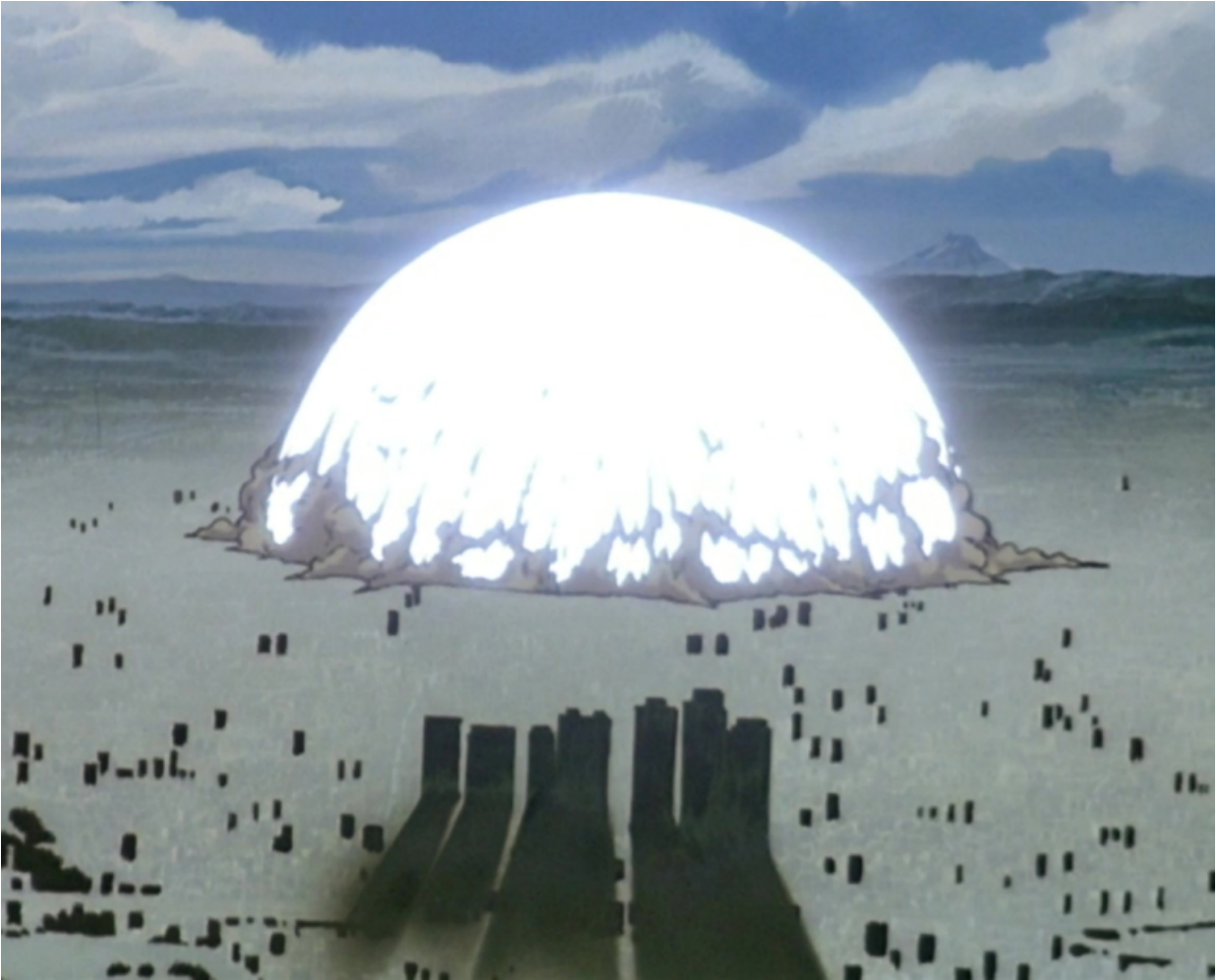
None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Prior to 1988 manga animation had a reputation for being stilted, lazy, cost-cutting and minimalist. In many scenes people's lips would move vaguely in accord with the words they were communicating. Beyond that, they were perfectly stationary, barely recognisable as representatives of the human race. And this was *before* being dubbed to English etc. None of it would have caused Walt Disney's ghost any sleepless nights. Akira turned this stereotype on its head when its futuristic cyberpunk entourage rode into town on a space-aged, super-sonic motorbike, waving a previously unheard of \$9m budget and 160,000 animation cells. Describing the 2182 page, onion-layered source material as epic or overwhelming wouldn't be overreaching. Katsuhiro Otomo 'condensed' his comic down to 2000 notepad pages worth of design concepts, subsequently slashing this back to 738, translating to 124 minutes of screen time for the cinematic release. What transpired is widely regarded as a revolutionary milestone in the history of the genre, inspiring

countless creative works spanning all viable mediums. Even *video games*. Gasp! There's a bit of foreshadowing for you.



Given the similar apocalyptic, grungy sci-fi overtones, Akira has been coined 'Japan's answer to Blade Runner'. Certainly, in terms of its influence and notoriety, it's a fair comparison. It was the first manga cartoon to be translated to English, opening the flood gates in America and far beyond.



Upon first introduction, many westerners seemed to revel in the spectacle conjured by Akira's elaborately fluid animation and vibrantly alluring, intricate landscapes without necessarily comprehending the plot, or caring much if it has one. For casual viewers, before the internet came along to facilitate their research and spark debate, it's appeal only extended to absorbing the mesmerising visuals, the dramatic tension, and crazy mind-bending twists and turns. Bizarrely lots of people seem content to let it wash over them like a disjointed, trippy music video, sauntering away to the next time-killing distraction without hankering to know what they'd just seen. That's one heck of a long time to spend being lost in the woods without a pic-er-nic basket!

On paper at least the narrative is actually quite tangible and coherent so it's hard to decipher what went wrong in between writing the screenplay and sharing the secret with the audience. Akira is full of peripheral fragments of sub-plots adopted from the manga that are never fully explored, and even the unifying core premise can seem equally mystifying at times. Perhaps this was deliberate to encourage multiple viewings and debate, possibly due to the sheer scope of the manga's story arc, or can it simply be attributed to poor editing? Armed with the prerequisite foreknowledge, a dedicated Akira aficionado would have been able to read between the lines. For outsiders, it was always going to be a challenge to interpret the void.



In 1988 Tokyo as we know is decimated by a seismic explosion, triggering the outbreak of World War III. By 2019 'Neo-Tokyo' has crawled out from beneath the rubble dust cloud to start afresh, and naturally, under the new regime (determined by the ultra-pessimistic laws of sci-fi), it's a barely habitable, primordial, dystopian hell-hole riddled with crime, pollution, corruption, and so on.

Shotaro Kaneda (pronounced Kan-ee-daah), leader of the 'Capsules', a drug-addled vigilante bosozoku biker gang, is the anti-hero of the hour and main protagonist.

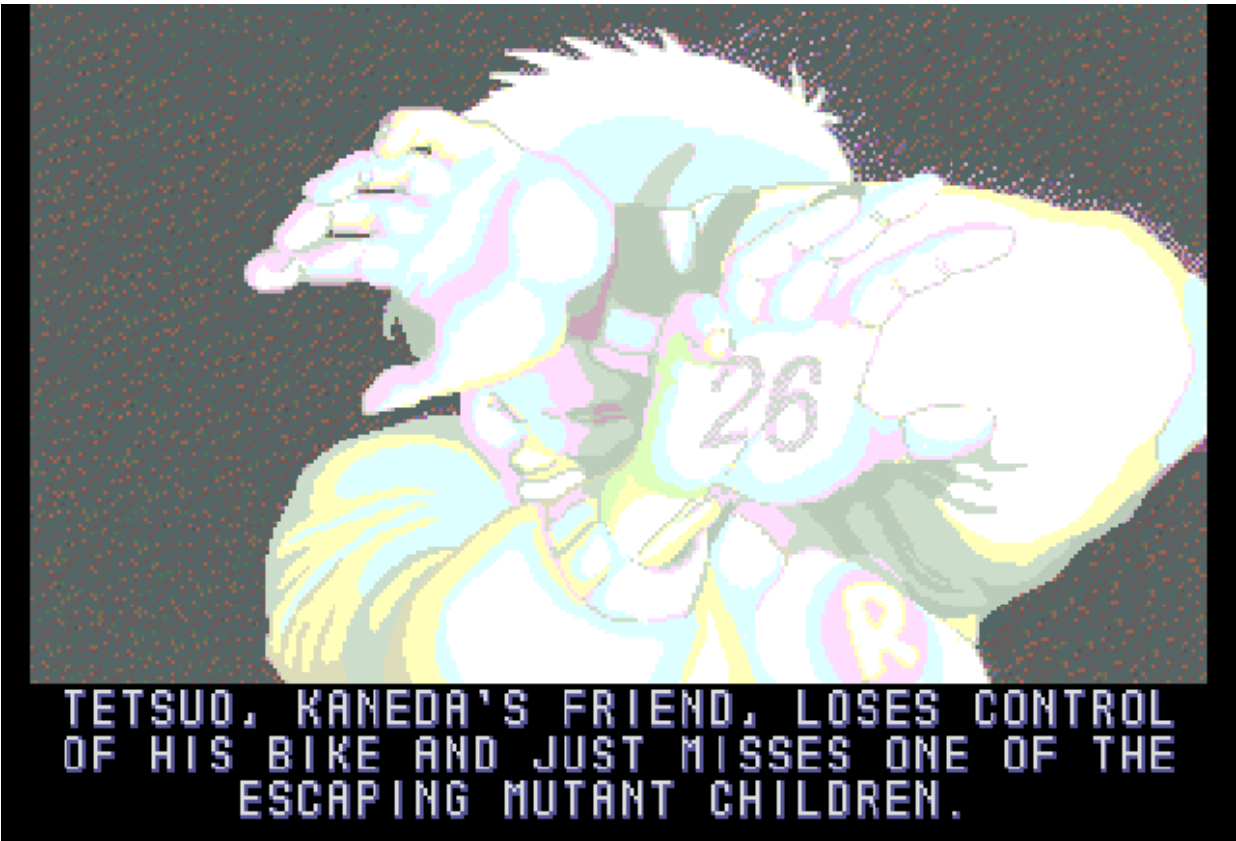


Life would be extremely dull were he to be permitted unhindered dominion over his turf so he's brought into an ongoing state of conflict with arch-rivals, the Clowns, who have the moral values of your average hedonistic comic book bad guys. Hardly engendering a neat contrast with the Capsule 'good' guys then, since they are portrayed as equally scurrilous. So far, so unpredictable.



Kaneda: (Tetsuo is brutally beating a member of the Clown gang) You're gonna kill him, Tetsuo! You want that?!

Tetsuo: I want him more than dead - I'll split his freaking head open!

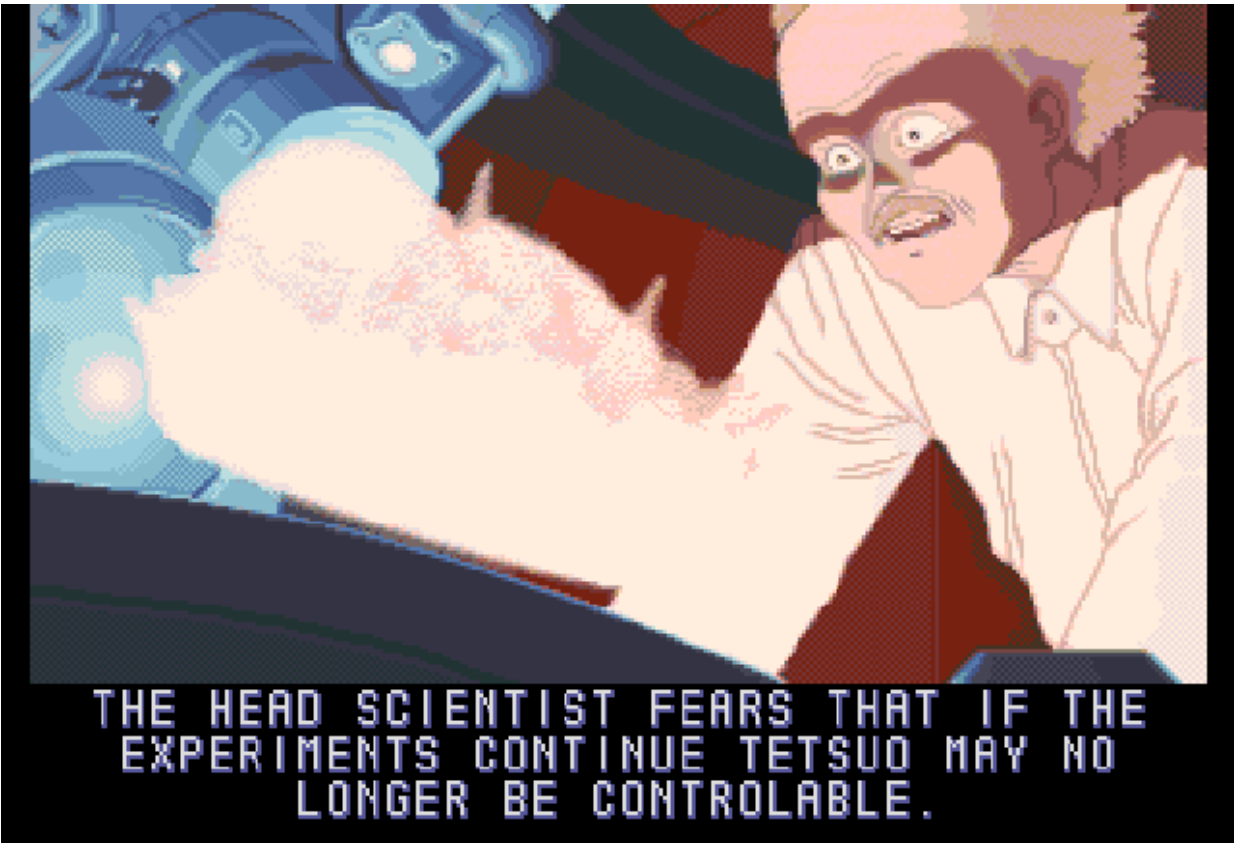


One day Kaneda's best friend, Tetsuo Shima, while out joyriding collides with an escapee from the Japanese government's covert laboratory, located under an Olympic sports stadium.



This telepathic 'esper' known as Takashi, having been meddled with as part of a (literally) underground experimental scientific research project, is the catalyst for a number of unanticipated repercussions for Tetsuo; primarily his latent, supreme psychic powers are awakened and go into overdrive.

Tetsuo: Heh, heh... what's happened to me? I must be dreaming. I feel like I can take out the world.



Where we're going we don't need spell-checkers!



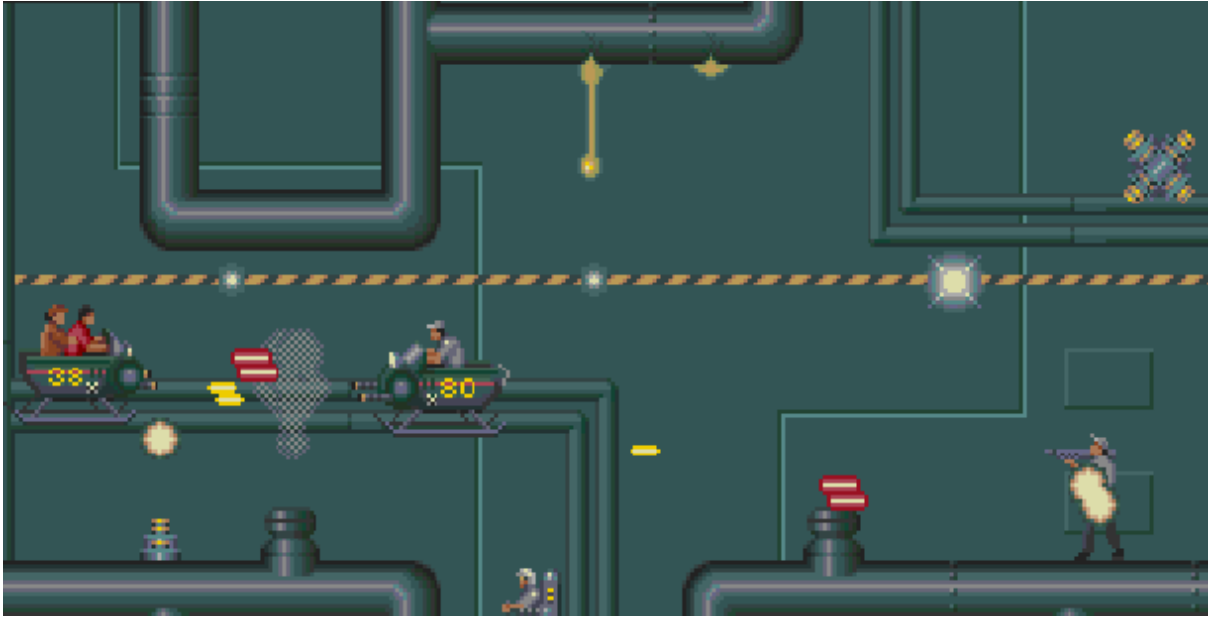
*Oops! Too late, Superman's evil doppelganger has landed!
Hmm, Christopher Reeve did it better in the second sequel.*

Japanese Self-Defence Forces Colonel, Shikishima, springs into action to contain the inconvenient incident by arresting the Capsules and taking them to a 'secure' hospital to turn Tetsuo into his latest guinea pig and keep his yapping friends quiet.



Of course they escape, otherwise, the story would end there. Kaneda teams up with resistance fighter, Kei, and together, stealing a military hover ski they swoop through a dilapidated sewer to freedom. Well, this would seem like a reasonable way to lead into an exhilarating set-piece. You could turn that into a shoot 'em up computer game level starring Kaneda and his co-conspirator!

"That's *Mr* KAN-EE-DAAA to you, punk!"



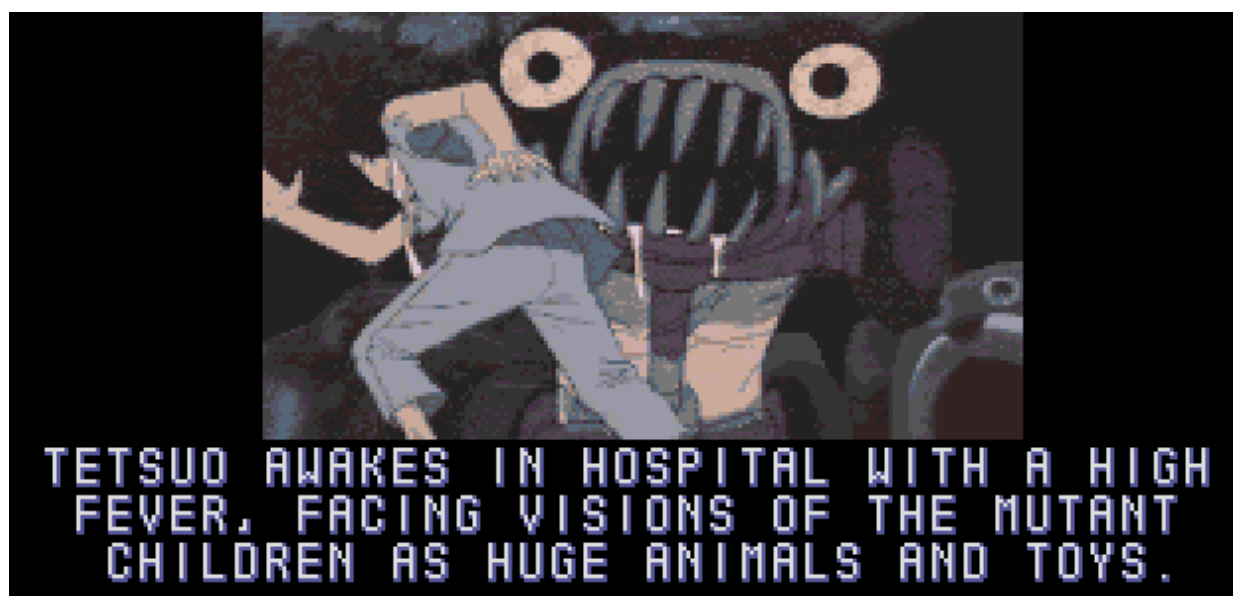
You know how sometimes when there are lots of characters in a movie it's easy to forget people's names? You needn't worry here. In particular KAN-EE-DAAA! and TET-SU-OHHH! are interjected/screamed into every scene at least ten times more often than required to follow normal human communication. Kaneda is squawked 52 times vs 75 shrieks of Tetsuo! No, I *didn't* count them one by one. I searched the script. That's one pointless name-drop every 57.09 seconds. Huh. It seems like a lot more.

If you face someone and look them in the eyes when you're talking to them - assuming they aren't mentally deranged - they tend to get the impression you're addressing *them*. I can't fathom why they'd need reminding who they are *every single time* you start a new sentence. It's utterly demented, and once you're aware of it, will drive you bat-guano insane. There's bound to be seven videos on YouTube highlighting every single example in quick succession with a tally counter to really put the absurdity into perspective. I guarantee it.

Ignoring all warnings regarding the cataclysmic ticking time bomb festering within Tetsuo, the government does

absolutely nothing to quell the threat posed by his burgeoning manic power as Japan edges ever closer towards another factory reset. Curious scientists, Colonel Shikishima and even Kaneda are torn between saving and killing Tetsuo for the greater good of preserving humanity's survival. For Kaneda this leads to an exploration of their contradictory, frayed, love-hate relationship. Cue a series of tumultuous internal conflicts that elevate Akira above your typical hero vs villain smashy-bashy 'toon.

Kaneda: He's not your friend, he's ours! If somebody's gonna kill him, it should be us!



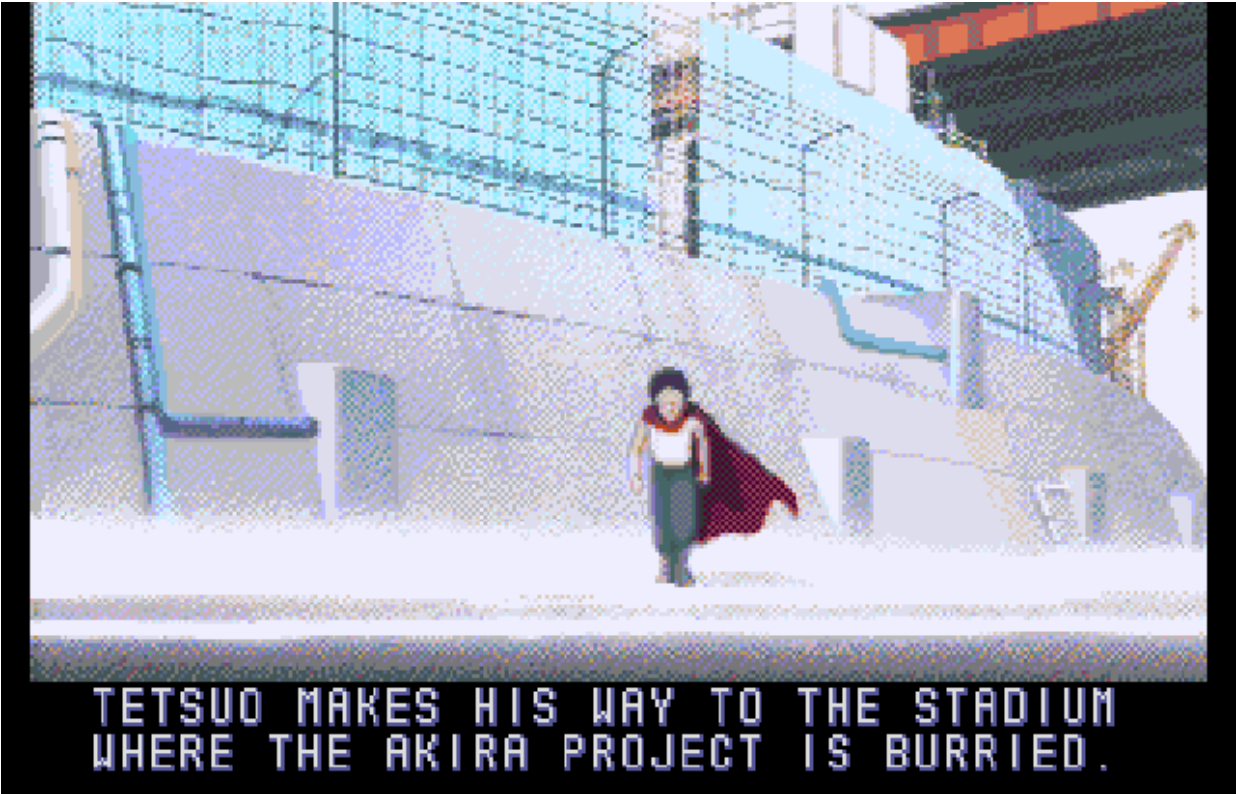
Laying the groundwork for this portentous meltdown, his medication lapsed, Tetsuo suffers crippling migraines and hallucinations. Phantasmagoric ones that introduce him to the colossal rabbits, teddy bears and bipedal toy cars that populate the esper's childhood daydreams/nightmares.



TETSUO AWAKES IN HOSPITAL WITH A HIGH FEVER, FACING VISIONS OF THE MUTANT CHILDREN AS HUGE ANIMALS AND TOYS.



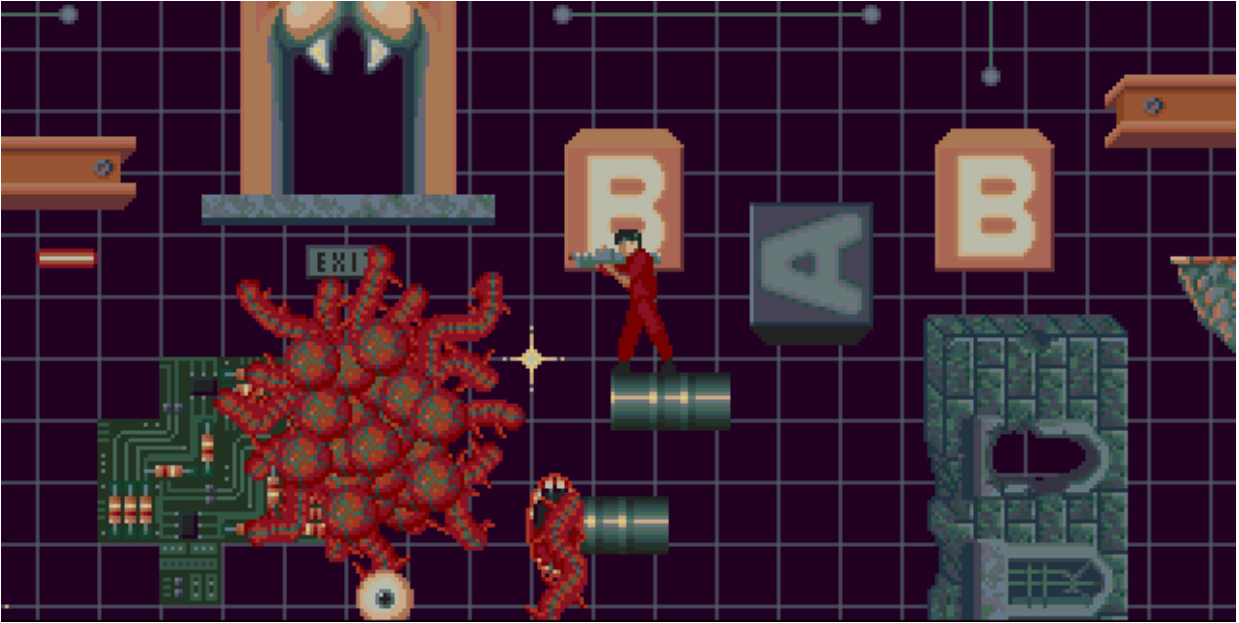
Looming high above Tetsuo threatening to end his mortal coil these abruptly collapse into gushing torrents of milk, dematerialising as swiftly as Tetsuo's forsaken sanity. Blurring the lines between the surreal and real, we never fully make the transition back to the comfort zone reality we thought we knew.



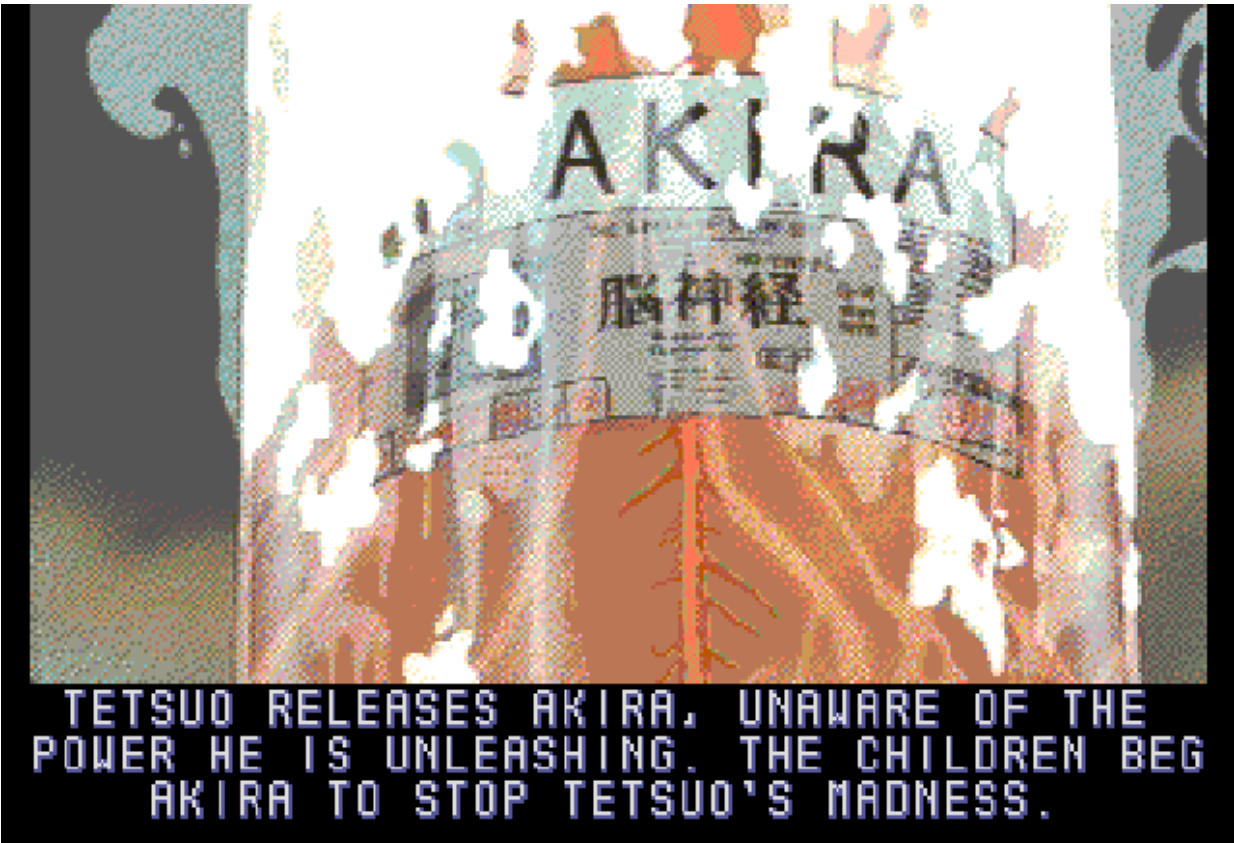
Believe it or not, Akira predicted that (Neo) Tokyo would play host to the 2020 Olympic games.



What seems like an aeon or two later Tetsuo mutates into a monstrous, amorphous blob-baby comprising alloyed body parts and perverted organic matter, bound together by sinews and nerves, engulfing everything in his (*its?*) path.



Akira - the esper who instigated Japan's initial ruin 31 years previously, who now exists as a collection of preserved body parts stored in cryogenic vials - is resurrected by his age-accelerated, experimental childhood cohorts.



A portal to another dimension is opened allowing the cast to evacuate in the nick of time as Tokyo-take-two erupts once more. Deja vu obliterates the city as the Benjamin Button granny-kids and Akira exchange baffling, metaphysical, unfinished sentences.



Takashi: It was too difficult for Tetsuo... of course, too difficult for us. And for Akira.

Masaru: We just didn't have the power.

Kiyoko: But someday we will be...

Masaru: Because we have already begun.

In the midst of this anarchic SNAFU Kaneda takes time out to embark on an imaginary trip down memory lane to rake over the coals of his childhood and strained relationship with Tetsuo. Meanwhile, Tetsuo ascends to the heavens to become an incorporeal, omnipotent god (or at least live on in another plane of existence in some form), and Kaneda/Kei survive ...because the audience deserve a (possibly-maybe-or-is-it?) happy, upbeat ending after enduring that brain-mashing assault on the senses.

That very briefly sums up the gist of the plot, without actually touching upon the thematic kernels, or what the hell any of it means. You'll find two hour round table discussions concerning this subject on YouTube and in podcast directories

so I'm hardly going attempt to compete with that in an adjunct to reviewing the game.

It's feasible that the citywide reboots Akira hinges upon are a reflection of Japan's overarching phobia of atomic bombs; a paranoid hangover incubated in the wake of the devastation wreaked in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the second world war. In contradiction, annihilation is almost seen as a cathartic release from the ravages of modern life and erosion of traditional Japanese culture and values. It's a cleansing ritual to be embraced rather than feared. An allegorical concept stemming from Buddhist philosophy, pertaining to the exploration of reincarnation and eternal energy. Tetsuo's transcendence is an allusion to the cessation of the human phase of his being, and rebirth into the next, minus the shackles of ephemeral physicality. In that sense it has a *happy* ending, ignoring the genocide of the rest of Neo-Tokyo's unenlightened populace.

Pushing aside the more abstract themes, less contentious ones include...

- Social alienation due to the oppression of rapid technological evolution (a by-product of Japan's rapid reconstruction following its atomic assault).
- A cautionary tale against the exploitation of scientific progress.
- A disconnect between youth, adulthood and authority - aimless, rebellious adolescence versus the industriousness demanded by the Japanese corporate ethos.

Gym Teacher: This school is your last chance! If trash like yourselves can't keep up with the academic ability of regular students, this is it! If you can't live a decent social life, you end up here! And if you screw up here, it's the end of the road!

Principal: Also, even though you're under fifteen, if you get more than fifty penalty points on your record, you're sent to the regular courts.

Kaneda: Eh, bite me. Don't mess with us, you bald, old goat.

Gym Teacher: Aren't any of you listening?!

Yamagata: You lost me half-way through, sir!

Gym Teacher: Discipline! (slaps Yamagata) Discipline!
(punches Kaisuke) Discipline! (punches Kaneda)
Discipline! (punches Takeyama) Discipline! (punches
Watanabe) Discipline! (punches Kuwata) Dismissed!

The Capsule Gang: Thank you very much, sir. (moans)

- The ubiquitous diffusion of self-serving corruption and casual abuse of power. Social and sovereign hierarchical power struggles, and the inequality it fosters. Misogyny and sexual violence.



- Succumbing to temptations such as drugs and sex.
- The dissolution of the hero versus villain trope, highlighting the flaws in humanity as a whole.
- Dependence, friendship, camaraderie and the consequences of betrayal.
- A willingness to put our faith in divine beings in search of salvation, validated by the re-interpretation of events as miracles.

But also Akira is whatever we wish to project onto it, steered by our own personal expectations and biases. There are no

hand-holding boundaries, or breadcrumb trails to follow towards a black and white answer, as we would presume, moulded by western blockbuster cinema.

By 1994 Akira the manga had been complete for four years, and thanks to the movie - curiously released two years prior to the saga's conclusion - had amassed a worldwide legion of disciples. Anyone brave enough to attempt to translate it to a playable medium would seriously have their work cut out given the convoluted, sprawling nature of the script and Gordian concepts it embraces. As Taito discovered in 1988 when they unveiled their poorly received, awkwardly limited little adventure game exclusively for the NES.

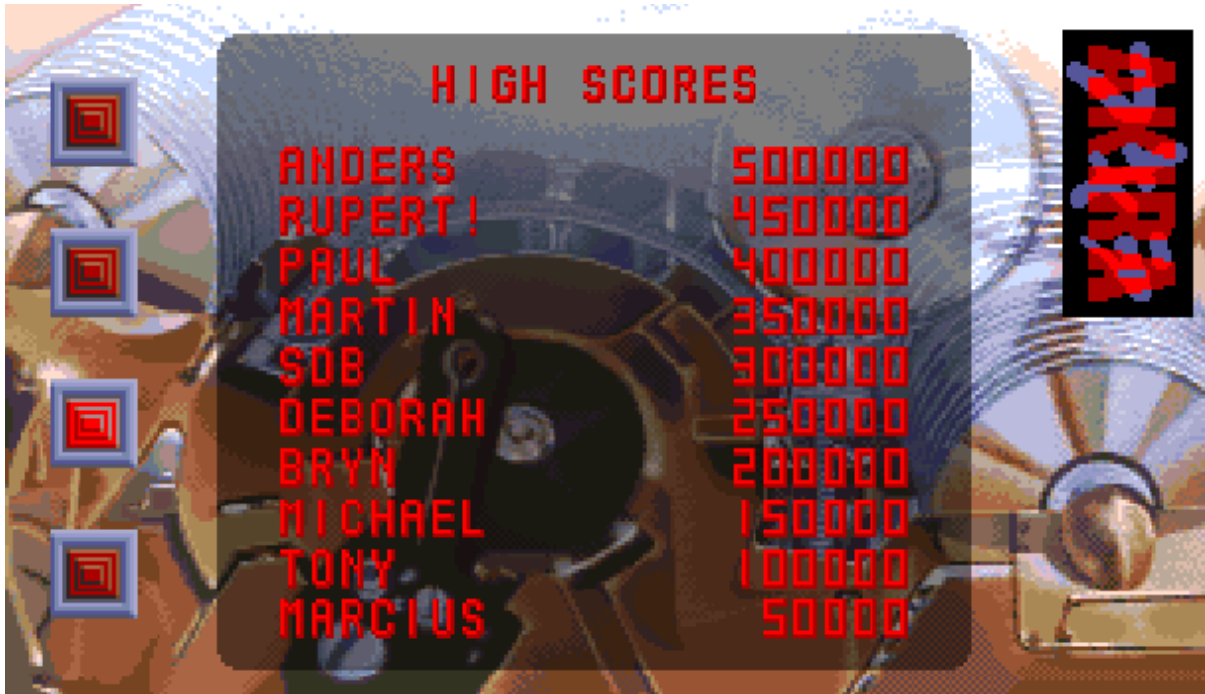


Fail to do it justice or disrespect the property in any way and Akira's die-hard fan-base would no doubt be baying for blood. The Japanese honour system can be a real killer. ;)

Few developers dared touch it with comedy-sized chopsticks so when ICE (an acronym for International Computer Entertainment) revealed they were to treat Amiga owners to an exclusive translation, they deserved a few kudos points. A daunting prospect, yet one that ICE recognised as a privileged opportunity to shine...

"Basing a game on a specific license is normally a hindrance in that we can only take the ideas from the film and then adapt them into a game, but with AKIRA there are so many incredible ideas throughout the film that our real problem was how to limit what actually ended up in the game. Another problem was that because AKIRA is such an important property to the originators, we've had to get clearance on everything we did."

Paul Atkinson (Akira programmer, The One, October 1994)



Hang on a minute some of those names remind me of the team who made Akira. What a crazy coincidence: Anders Johansson, Paul Atkinson, Martin Blackmore, Rupert Jones, Tim Bartlett.

Adaptations for competing systems were initially proposed, yet failed to come to fruition. It's not clear if ICE were to be involved with the cancelled console games being worked on by THQ in 1994.

"There are so many versions of AKIRA in production that as soon as I finish on AKIRA for the Amigas, I'll be helping on one of the others."

Paul Atkinson (Akira programmer, The One, October 1994)

You'd imagine a Japanese outfit might be best placed to create a worthy accompaniment to the movie. Instead, ICE hailed from Stroud in Gloucestershire, England, and so likely would have relied on the movie's shoddy, out of sync first

English dub for research purposes. The one in which Cam Clarke (Leonardo from the original TMNT cartoon) played Kaneda. Not that there's anything wrong with his performance per se, it's just extremely difficult to take seriously when all you can think about is pizza, Ninjatos, and bodacious turtle dudes.

ICE mostly published third party software, their only other in-house Amiga creation being Total Carnage, a mediocre albeit updated Robotron clone. Amiga Power critic, Jonathan Davies, noted that this sold so poorly it would explain why he received his copy of Akira on floppy disks recycled from a Total Carnage package. Apparently you could peel the labels back and there was the evidence printed right on the plastic. Maybe it was a review sample, who knows?





Development of Akira the game was overseen by the movie's IP holders - Kodansha - so you'd expect it to meet a reasonable standard and echo the plot of the 1982 manga. Long after the movie had been distributed globally there was no real rush to market aside from the 'borrowed time' status of the 16-bit era. Corroborating the theory, Akira was in the works for over a year, having initiated in January 1994, then delayed by five months beyond the original ETA, ultimately appearing in April 1995. Unveiled a year after Commodore folded and its associated magazines were seriously considering winding up their coverage, the Amiga/CD32 exclusive was never going to be a raging success. Time is relative and other perspectives are available.

"The animations provide a good method of explaining the story behind AKIRA (which is definitely not an easy task!) and if we'd had more memory, our priority would have been to increase the amount of animation sequences. The worst part of the project has been the short development time relative to the size of the game."

Paul Atkinson (Akira programmer, The One, October 1994)

Poor timing aside, I don't think anyone would have predicted just how awful the reception would turn out to be. That is barring ICE themselves who contacted 'The One' magazine requesting that they only review the game if they were prepared to score it above 80%! Instead, they published the hard evidence attempt at manipulating the public (a fax) and demolished the tawdry effort with a 6% assessment in the interests of journalistic integrity. You'll find the extract included in my 'Amigo Scour 5' article.

Amiga Power, Amiga Format, Amiga Computing, and CU Amiga were almost as flabbergasted by the dire offering, dismissing it with 16%, 18%, 36% and 18% bottom lines respectively. Jonathan Davies of Amiga Power fame even had to buy his own £30 copy of the game because a review sample failed to materialise from ICE. None of which prevented Akira from reaching a respectable position in the sales charts: no. 14 in March 1996 and no. 13 in April 1996.

"The game has had quite a big build-up and because it bore the name Akira, I was really expecting a good title. All hopes were well and truly dashed I'm afraid. The graphics are poor and the gameplay doesn't work as well as it should.

Different aspects of the film have been incorporated to provide a varied playing style. The motorbikes give an obstacle course objective, the sewers test your piloting skills as you fly around shooting the enemies and avoiding the traps, and other parts were used for more of the usual platformer levels. This was a great concept but it just didn't come across.



The levels are designed to provide maximum frustration rather than just longevity, and it wasn't long before I was tearing my hair out. To those who persevere I'm sure some enjoyment could eventually be gleaned, but quite frankly I wasn't that way inclined. The in-game music made me feel drowsy, the poor graphics became tedious and I felt rather cheated by it all.

I wanted to like the game. It sounded new and original but unfortunately, it wasn't. If you're a true Akira fan you'll enjoy the clips of film animation and the way the game incorporates the plot and the characters - but even then, you're still left with some very dated gameplay. This could have been a great license which should have been exploited to the full. A shame."

Amiga Computing (April 1995)

"You really don't want to play this for more than five minutes. Offers to take up the joypad were spurned by

colleagues hastily burying their heads in needlecraft mags.

The sprites have no character, the gameplay is shabby enough to warrant execution at the hands of bad people from the other side of the world, who first use torture techniques previously thought improbable. The graphics are faceless, the level design plain dull.

Akira is £30. If you've already bought it, one can only sympathise - and then suggest you should have learned by now not to dash out and buy games without reading AF reviews first. The shock of loading this up could kill the faint-hearted."

Amiga Format (April 1995)

"At no point does Akira even begin to approach the quality of the original film (generally agreed by AP to be pretty good, if unnecessarily hard to understand). The graphics aren't even remotely stylish or Japanese-looking, with feeble animation and messy colours. The presentation, involving digitised stills from the film, is fairly slick, but serves only to make the actual game look even more terrible.

And it's incredibly difficult. Being difficult isn't a bad thing in itself, of course, as long as it's done properly. But Akira is more unfair than difficult, with its loads-of-shots-to-kill baddies and unanticipatable dead ends. And it doesn't earn your respect in a way that makes you want to persevere with it, like a proper difficult game should.

Which is why you won't ever get past level one.

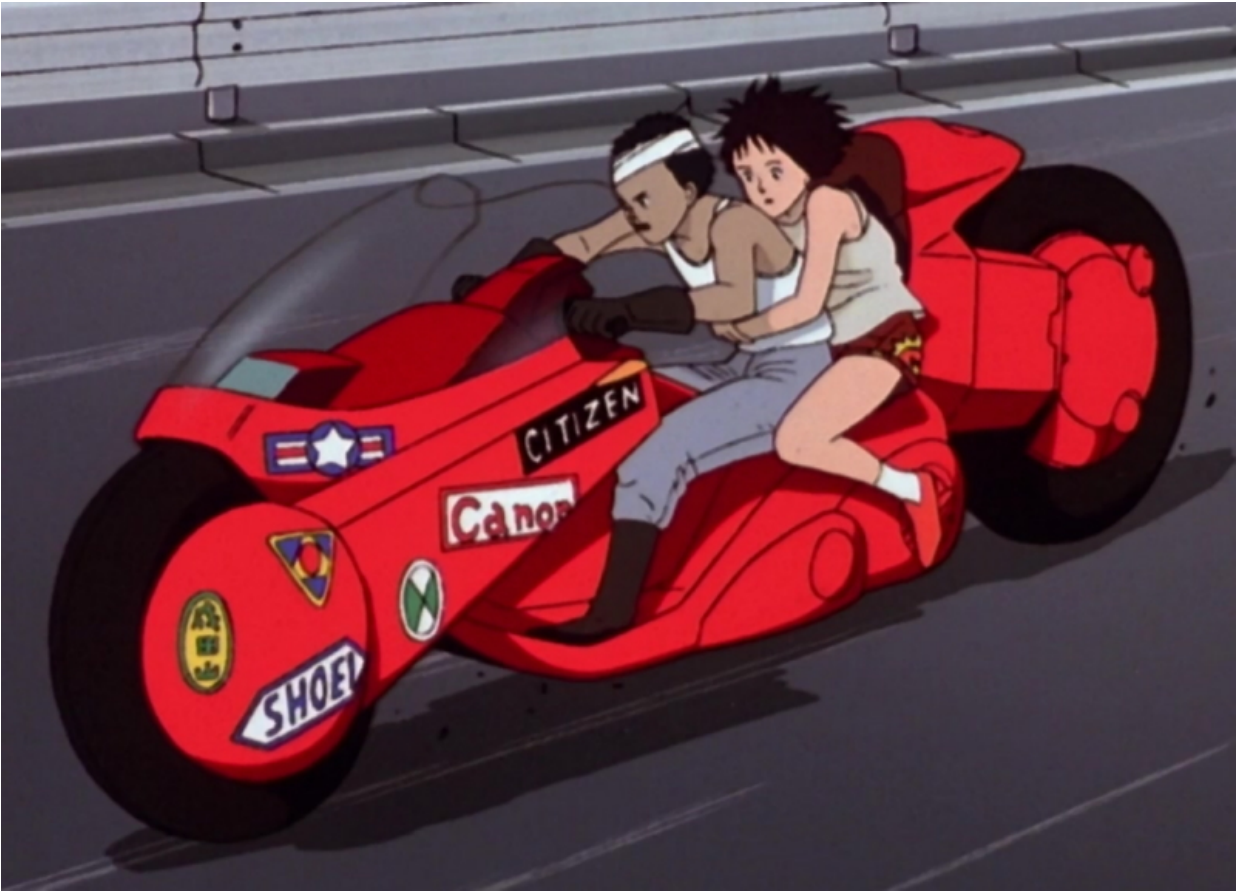
Quite how such a spectacular film has been turned into such an utterly wretched game isn't entirely clear,

especially given the supposed involvement of the film's production company."

Amiga Power (April 1995)

"The game now looks and plays beautifully. The graphics are superb and the animations are fluid, making the game look and feel like the original film. The animation within the film is so good that the graphics on the computer screen had to reflect that - this was the area that had most worried everybody. We took a big gamble producing this game, and so took on an animator who'd never worked on the computer before. We did this because we didn't want him to have any preconceived ideas about what a computer game should look like. It has worked very well and we're delighted with the results."

Paul Atkinson (Akira programmer, The One, October 1994)



"If I said Akira on the Amiga was disappointing it would be a massive understatement. It really is terrible. I found the controls were slow and clumsy, and the character animation very wooden.

I also found fault with the gameplay - it was limited at the best of times. The early levels have you riding around on a motorbike, bumping into traffic cones which boost your speed. Hello! Mr Programmer, I don't want to ruin the illusion for you, but if you were to ride your motorbike into a traffic cone at 100mph, rather than speeding up, I think you'd be more likely to perform a triple front somersault with a half twist. The music and sound effects also failed to impress me.

In case you hadn't guessed by now, Akira is a big disappointment. It was always going to be hard to

produce a game anywhere near as good as the film, but there's no excuse for releasing something which in my opinion is awful. Just when movie tie-ins were getting really good."

CU Amiga (April 1995)

Had it been released alongside the movie in 1988 I think the press would be singing a different tune. What nailed the coffin firmly shut for ICE was ignoring seven years worth of technological evolution. Even so, Akira was typical fayre for a late-era Amiga licensed title, comprising a multi-genre medley of platforming, horizontally scrolling biking and... erm, shoot-'em-up-ing. Keep in mind that 1994 was also the year in which our haggard Amigas were bedevilled with the likes of Bram Stoker's Dracula, Surf Ninjas and Cliffhanger. Three of the worst titles for the system, IP affiliations notwithstanding.



We alternately play as Kaneda (spelt three different ways between the manual, box and in-game) or Tetsuo as the setting demands, whilst each of the three styles of play is adapted from key action sequences from the movie. Credit where it's due, ICE *were* paying attention. It's easy to see the origins of the various elements and the plot is entirely recognisable.

"The project spec was to produce a game that would appeal to a wide range of players - we didn't want something that singled out only one group of game players. The ideas all come from the film and the structure of the game is built in the same way as the film itself. There are twelve sections, each based on a different part of the film's plot."

Paul Atkinson (Akira programmer, The One, October 1994)

Focused on dodging and destroying, naturally, the manga's grandiose themes aren't remotely touched upon. We'd have to save that for the point and click adventure, which was never produced, or even proposed. Sorry to dash your hopes, again.

We begin by steering Kaneda through the ramshackle, neon-lit streets of Neo-Tokyo on his two-wheeled speed demon.



THE SHINING METROPOLIS OF NEO TOKYO
AROSE FROM THE ASHES OF WORLD WAR THREE.

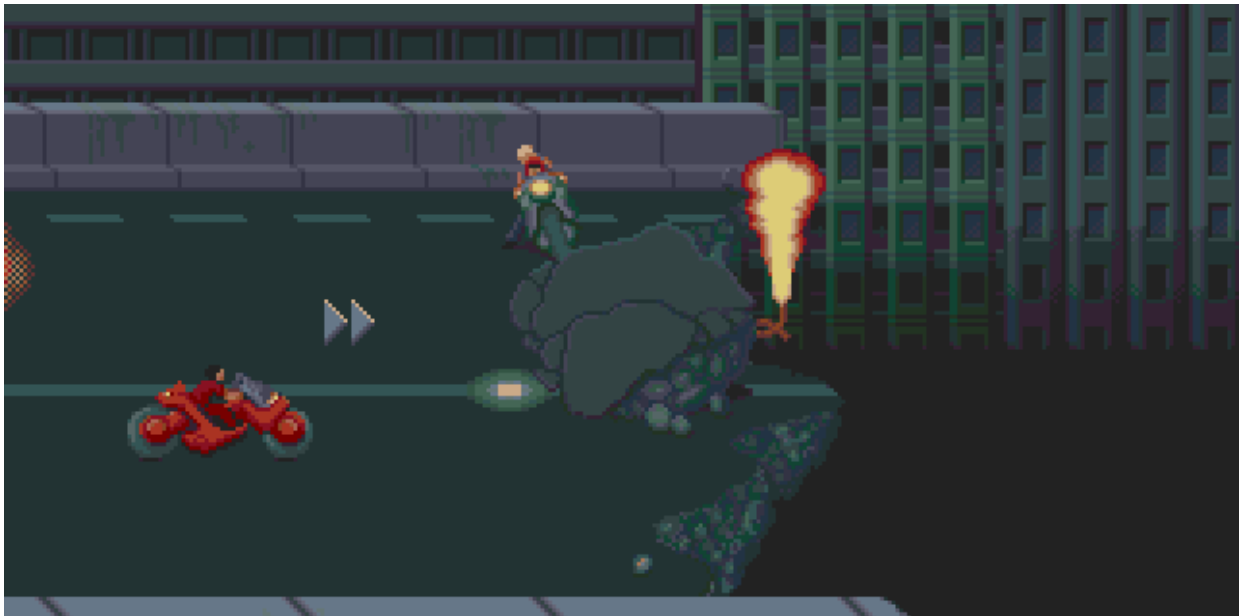


Tetsuo: Twin ceramic rotor drives on each wheel! And these look like computer-controlled anti-lock brakes! Wow, 200 horses at 12,000 rpm!

Against the clock (and depleting fuel levels) we must swerve obstacles, jump gaping chasms wherever the road has collapsed and try not to throw our controller through the window in frustration.



Our foremost predicament is that jumps can only be made having first run over a fast-forward icon to build up speed, and these are easily missed unless you've played and crashed a hundred times before, memorising their placement along the way. I say 'crashed' because you *do* actually crash into crevasses rather falling through them.



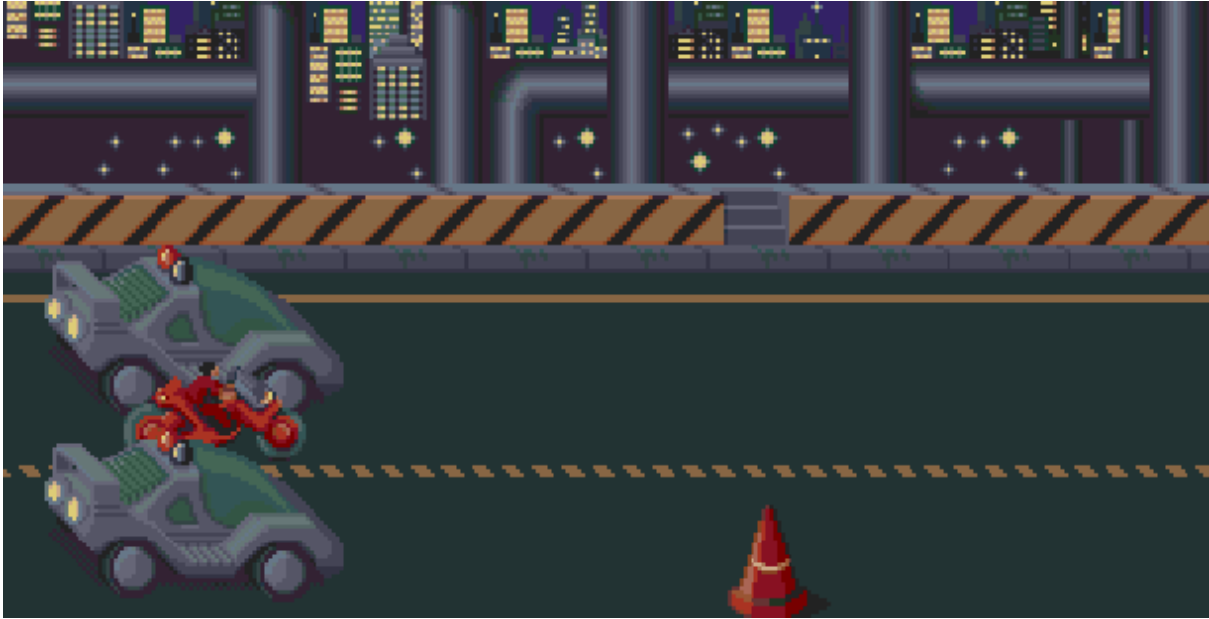
Grenade pick-ups are equally essential in that we're incapable of clearing the road-filling blockades without them.

Approach these unarmed and we sustain a fatal collision no matter how slowly we happen to be travelling.



Whilst it's undoubtedly infuriating for newcomers, I *can* imagine how a really competent player would find this satisfying. It takes practice to accomplish in one sweep, with each terminal collision returning us to the start, so watching the longplay is a sight to behold.

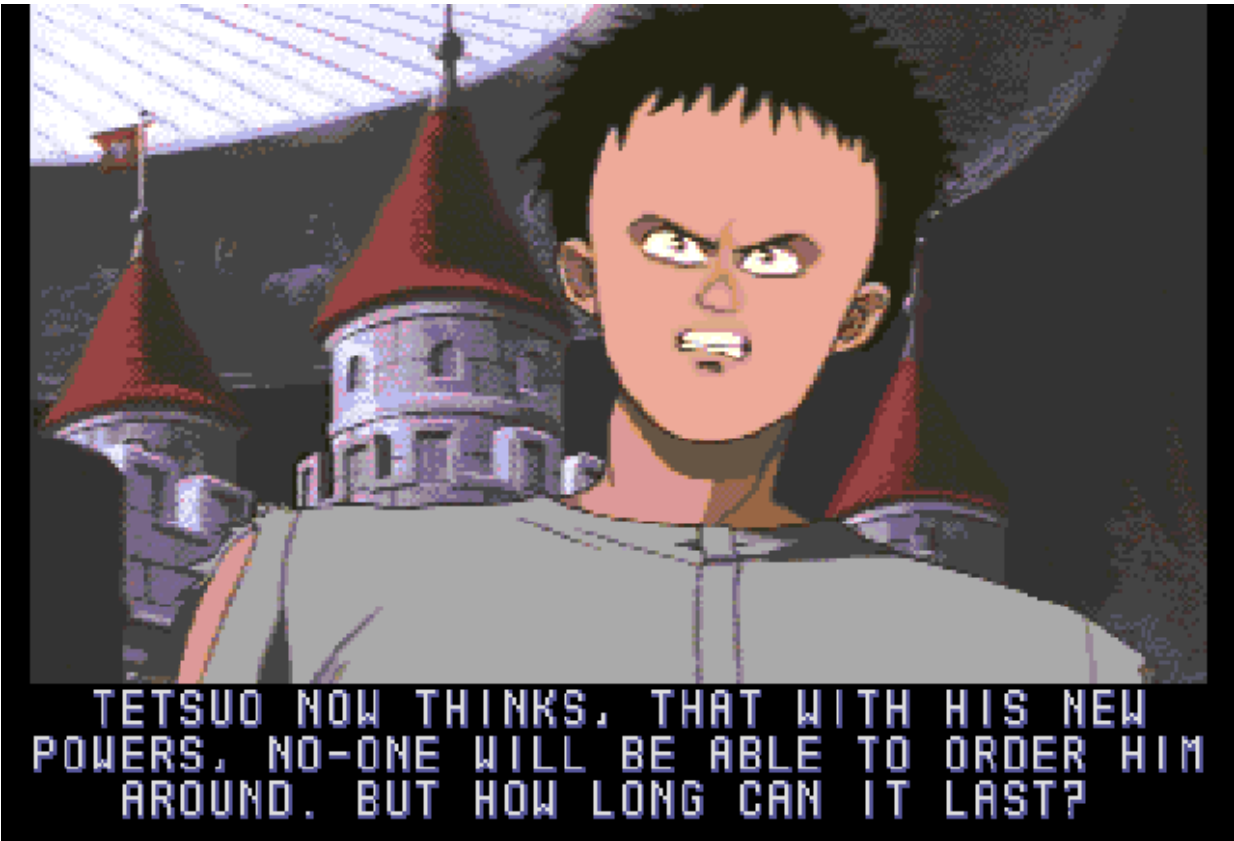
A similar scenario is presented in level two, only there we must outrun the police by collecting speed boosters. Otherwise, seeing as they travel faster than us by default, we'll be caught and lose a life.



What's the police's favourite sandwich filling?

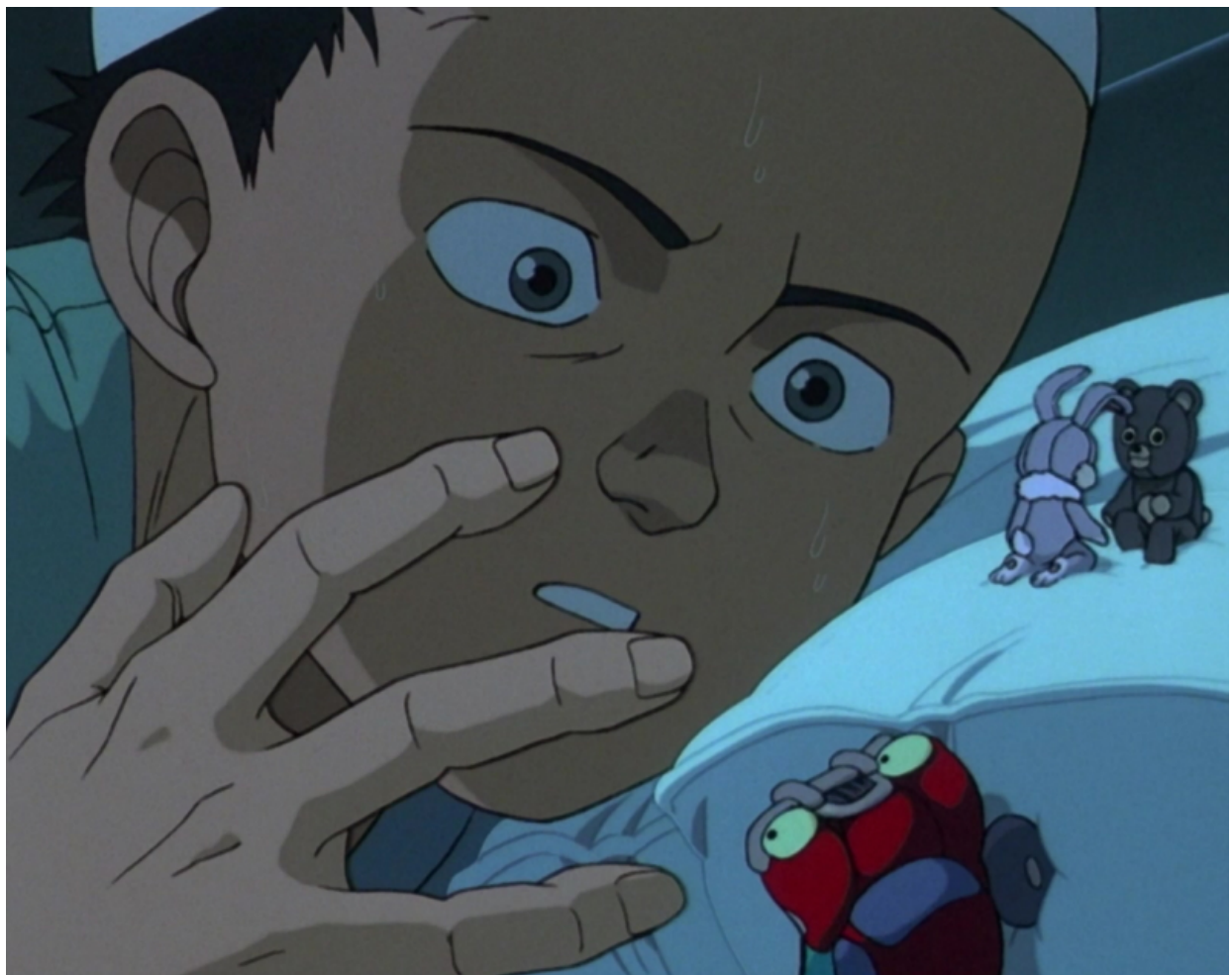
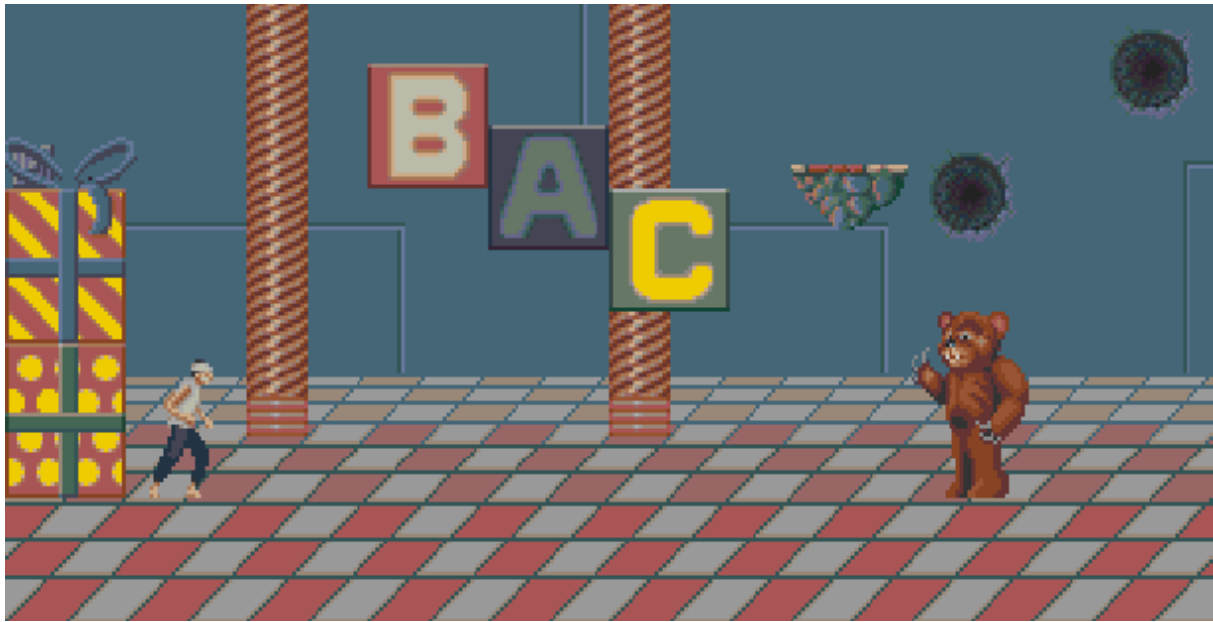
Cheating to see beyond these endurance tests using the relevant password, the gameplay shifts into platforming mode. For these excursions - playing as Tetsuo - we get to explore and escape from the military hospital, and toy room/castle projected by the espers' trippy segueways into Pandora's box.





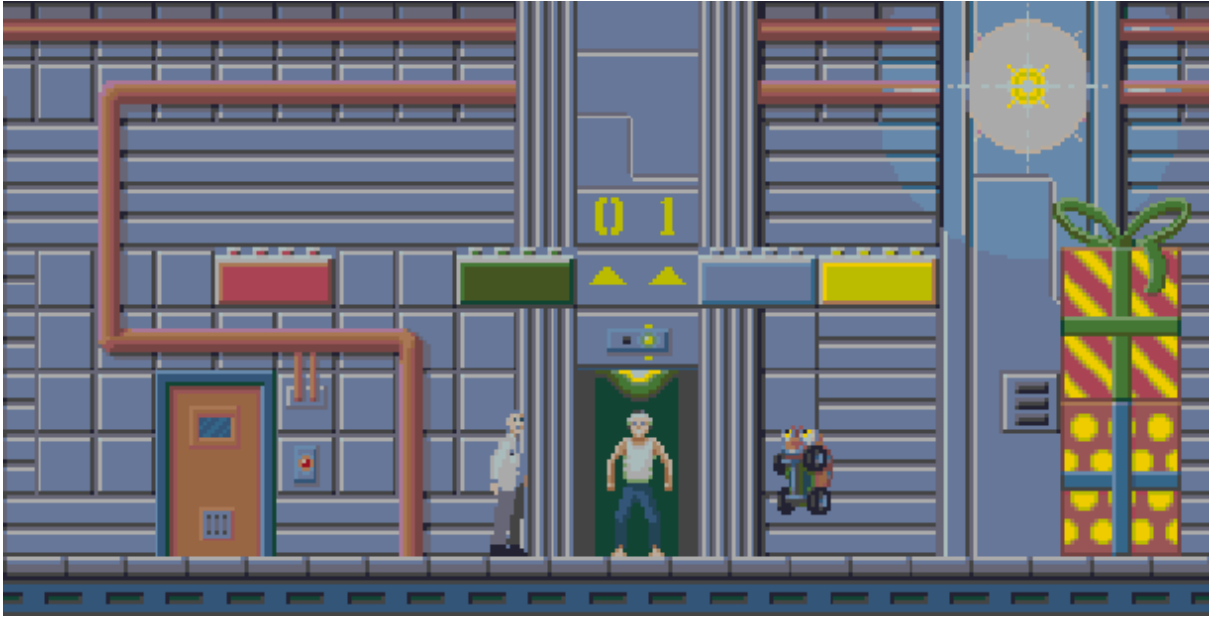
Did I mention that the word 'esper' derives from ESP as in extrasensory perception? Alfred Bester coined the term via his 1950 short story 'Oddy and Id'.

Reminiscent in style to the surreal nonsense seen in Harlequin or Weird Dreams, in Toyland we encounter ferocious gargantuan teddy bears...



...milk-spitting toy cars that remind me of CarVup (based on City Connection by Jaleco), fluffy bunny wabbits and zeppelins. All plucked straight from the movie's short medication-deprived hallucinatory sequence. Hospitalised, our experience is more akin to Technocop, or Flashback what with its access cards and multitude of lift-based action, only without the finesse.

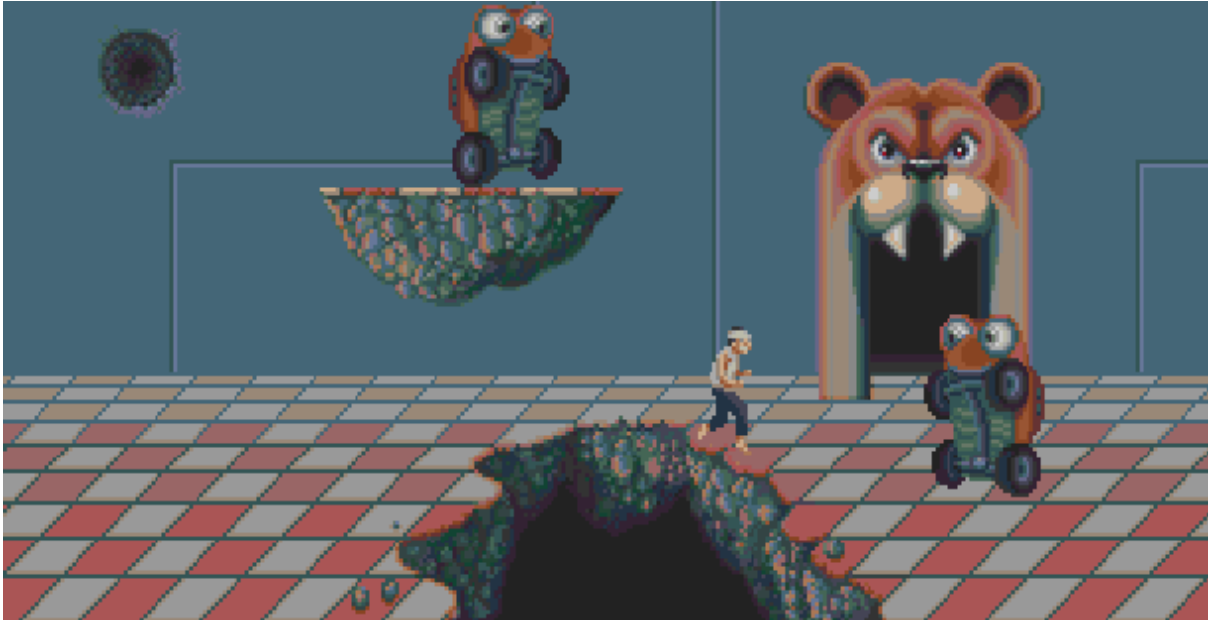




To replenish our energy, open sesame the exit and finish these levels we're required to stock our 'replicator' with aura gathered from fallen guards (mimicking the globe seen in the movie engaged with monitoring Tetsuo's psychic aura). Or should that be 'gaurds' Mr Manual?



Jumping is of the imprecise, wonky-inertia-ed, floaty variety. Should we land on the edge of a platform we're harshly jolted away from it like two magnets repelling one another. As in the bike stages there's an unavoidable abyss or two to circumnavigate. Even though they don't all stretch to encompass the entire width of the floor we're incapable of tiptoeing around them because we can't walk towards or away from the player. Any sense of depth is just an illusion - we only occupy a single horizontal plane of existence, so must instead attempt to leap across. Of course, our jump-span is almost exactly the same as the width of the pits.

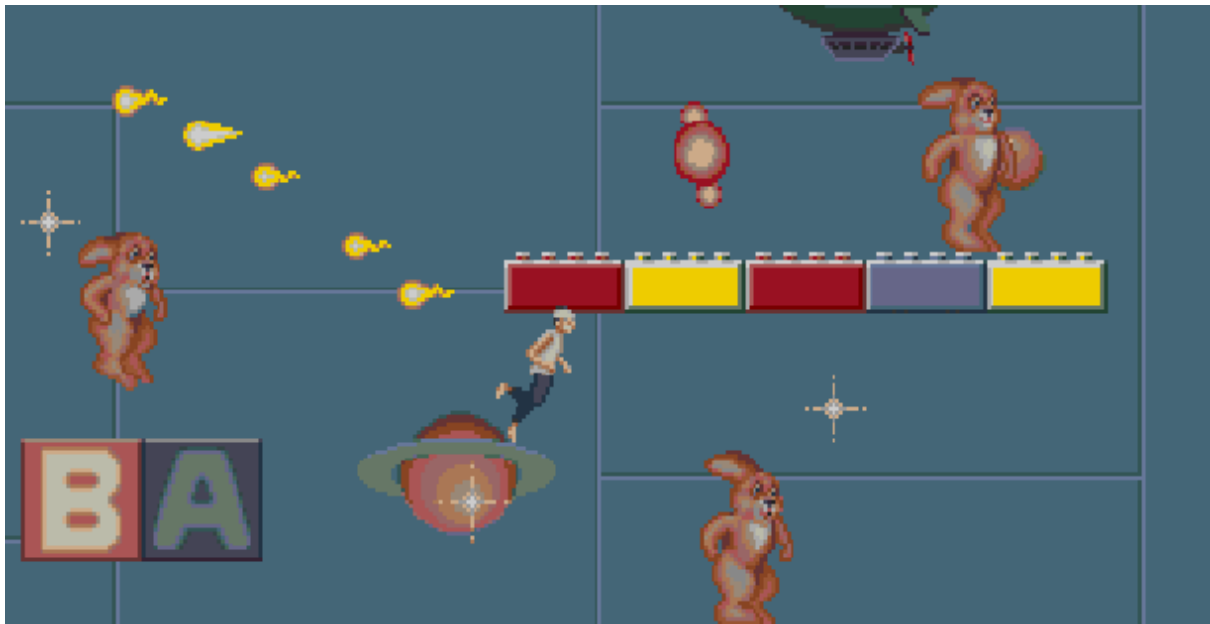


Taking a lengthy run-up must surely help, except to do that you have to push diagonally down and then suddenly flick to the up position when you wish to jump. Cliffhanger employs exactly the same control scheme and it's equally unworkable there. Maybe an accelerated perma-run option might have been preferable?

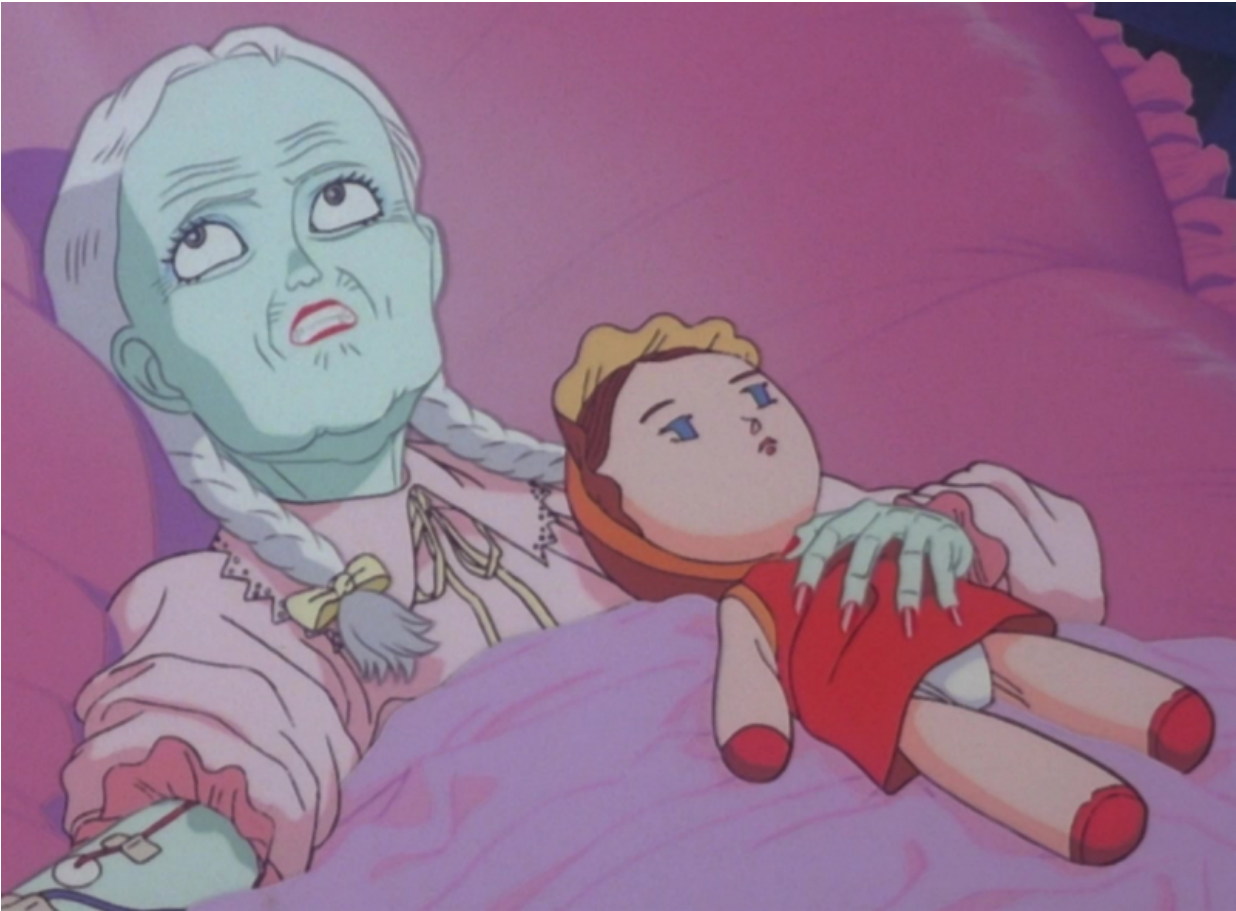
Weapon-wise we come equipped with a laser gun, just like the one Kaneda attempts to deploy against Tetsuo on the silver screen, although fails to do so when the battery dies, sparking a childish hissy fit. Much like the one we'll be throwing as we attempt in vain to progress through Akira. Hardly conducive that we can only shoot horizontally, not vertically or diagonally up or down. Come on! RoboCop nailed this in 1988... even on the ZX Spectrum and C64.

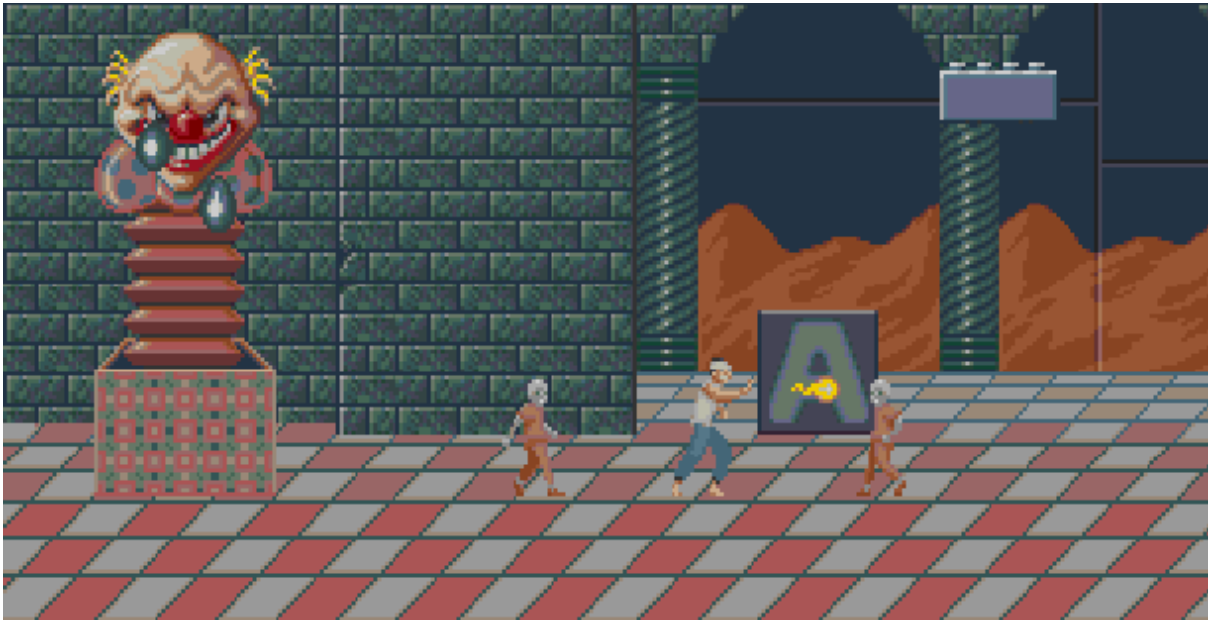


Collecting clouds allows us to fly for a short period so as to reach higher platforms (LEGO or alphabet bricks even).



Or evade attacks from deranged killer rabbits, aged-
youngsters...





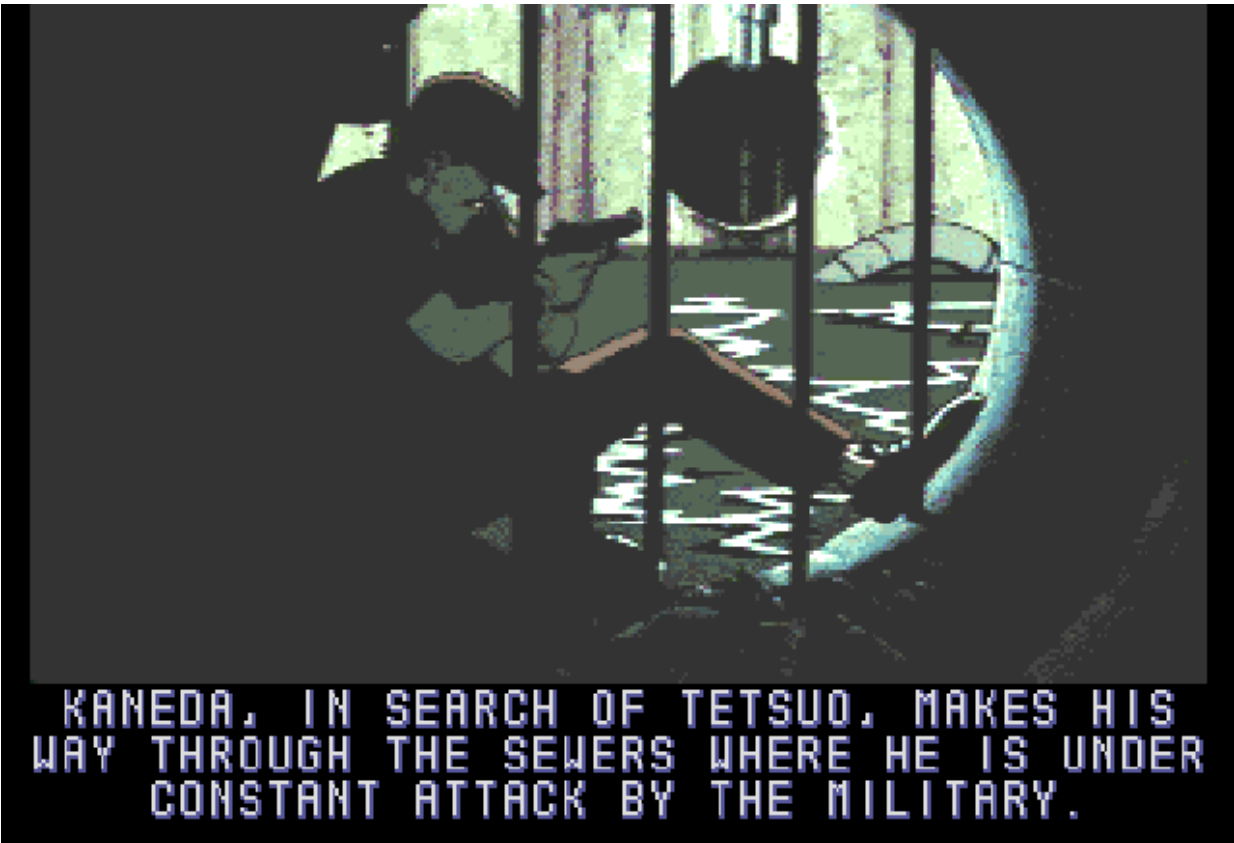
One biker's friend is another biker's enemy. Shame the espers aren't much help during Kaneda's levels. They could have been called to arms like Shadow Dancer's attack dog!

...dancing skittles and matchsticks, Jack in the box acid-teared clowns or psychotic medical orderlies. Otherwise, it's as bland a platformer as you will have ever experienced playing Amiga games since day one.



Before reacquainting ourselves with pedestrian perambulation, playing once again as Kaneda, we must get to grips with the scrolling shooter section located in the rat-infested sewer. We can't hit them with our pea-shooter pistol owing to it having no aiming arc, so you might want to try stomping them instead... if I can trouble you to break away from your oil-drum-dancing practice for a moment.





KANEDA, IN SEARCH OF TETSUO, MAKES HIS WAY THROUGH THE SEWERS WHERE HE IS UNDER CONSTANT ATTACK BY THE MILITARY.

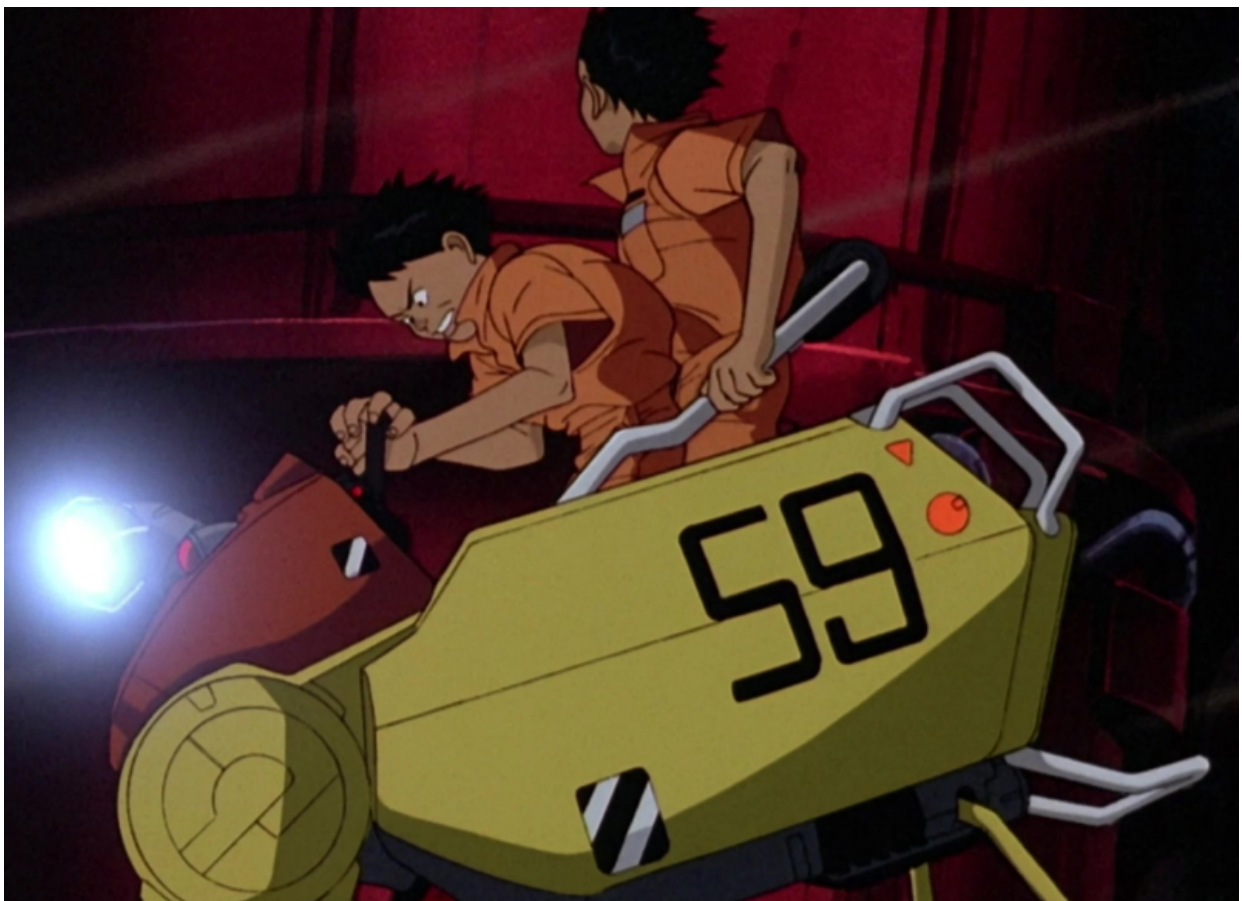
Emulating the movie we ride in a stolen hover sled thingy accompanied by resistance fighter, Kei.



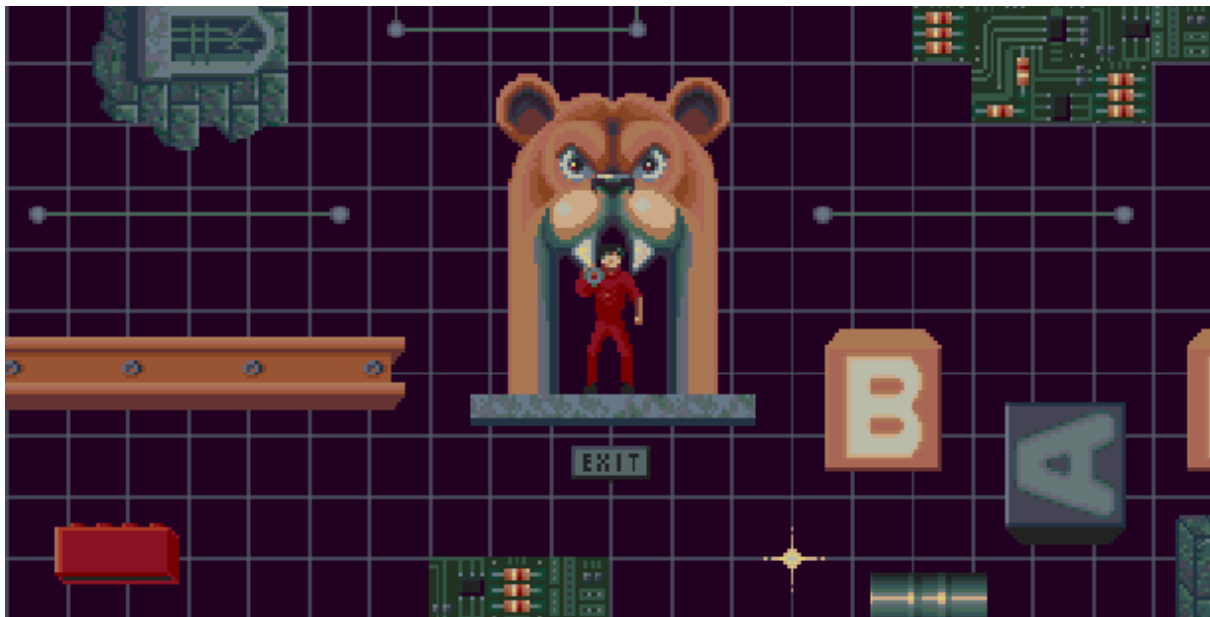
KANEDA MANAGES TO TAKE A MILITARY HOVER
SKI, FLYING AWAY WITH KEI, A MEMBER OF
THE RESISTANCE.

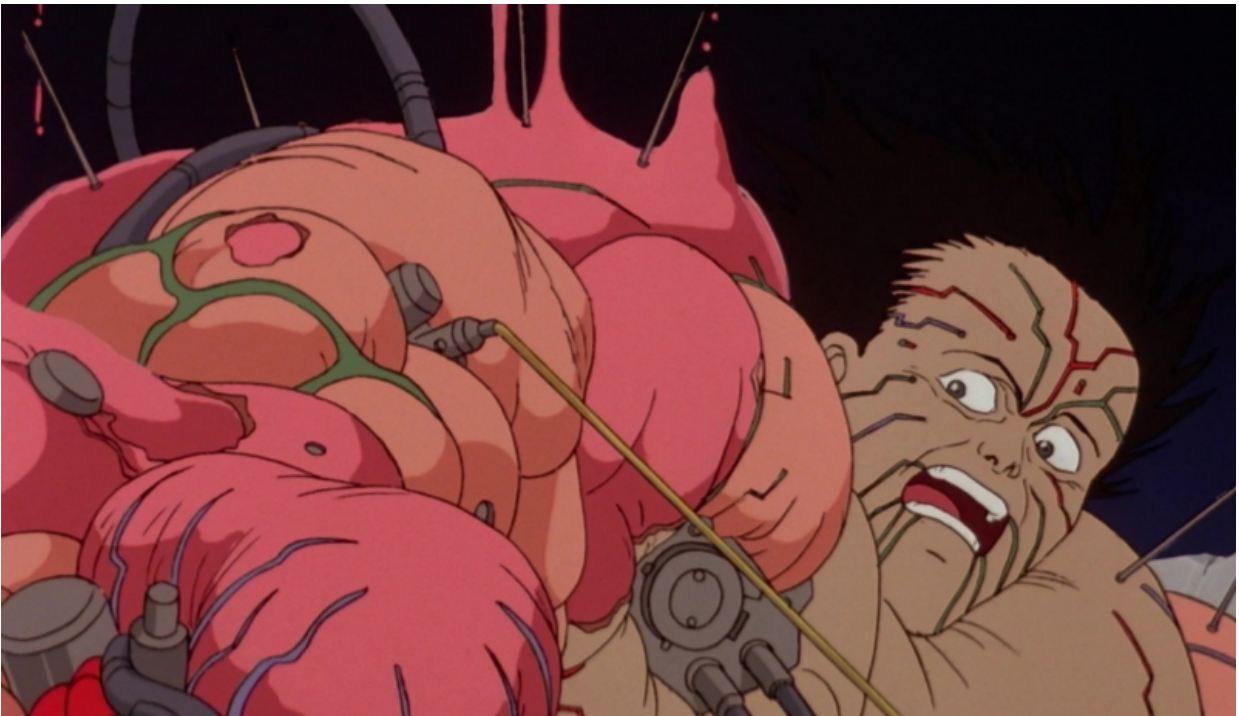
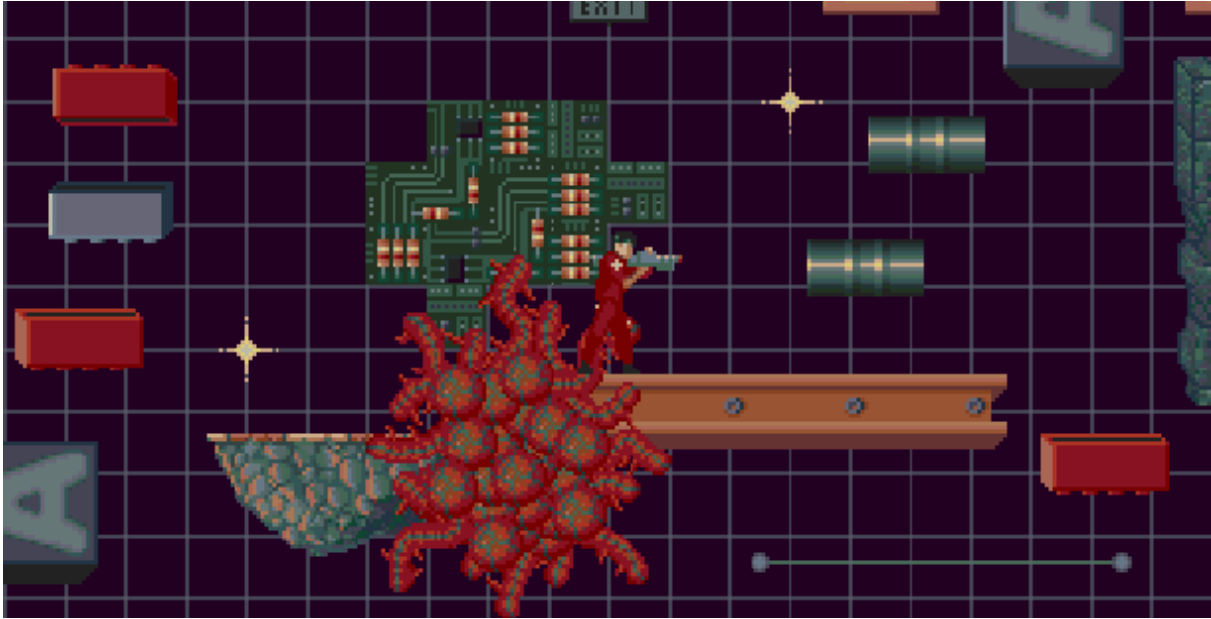


Preoccupied with averting an onslaught of military guards we head towards the baby room in search of Tetsuo (well, in the movie anyway, I think the chronology has been muddled slightly). As you'd expect, the glacial pace, claustrophobic playfield, and predictable mechanics do nothing to advance the genre in any way. More paint by numbers design, the saving grace being that we *do* eventually reach the exit.



Finally, we rendezvous with a pathetically warped rendition of Tetsuo, squaring up to him in a bouncy, platforming laser duel to the death. Considering the histrionics of his theatrical, visionary transformation in the movie, this half-hearted attempt at concluding Kaneda's journey is pitiful. Mildly pulsating, he floats leisurely around the arena, mostly in the opposite direction to the player, loosening his excess bodily organs in the vague hope that they might cross our path at some point. Often he'll go AWOL forcing us to track him down via the radar. As ever, perseverance and repetition rather than skill prevails.

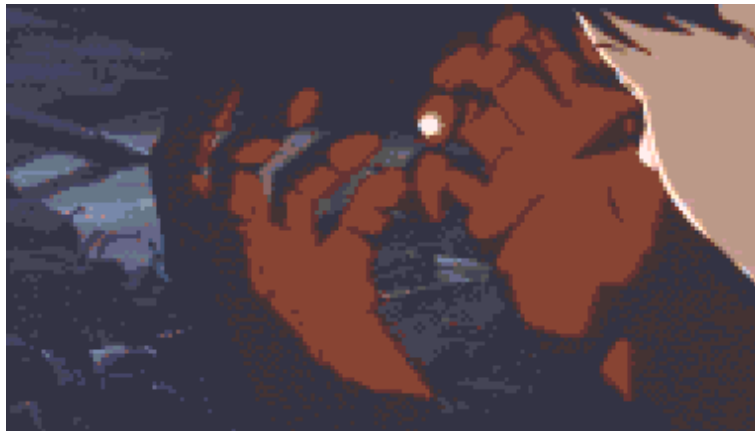
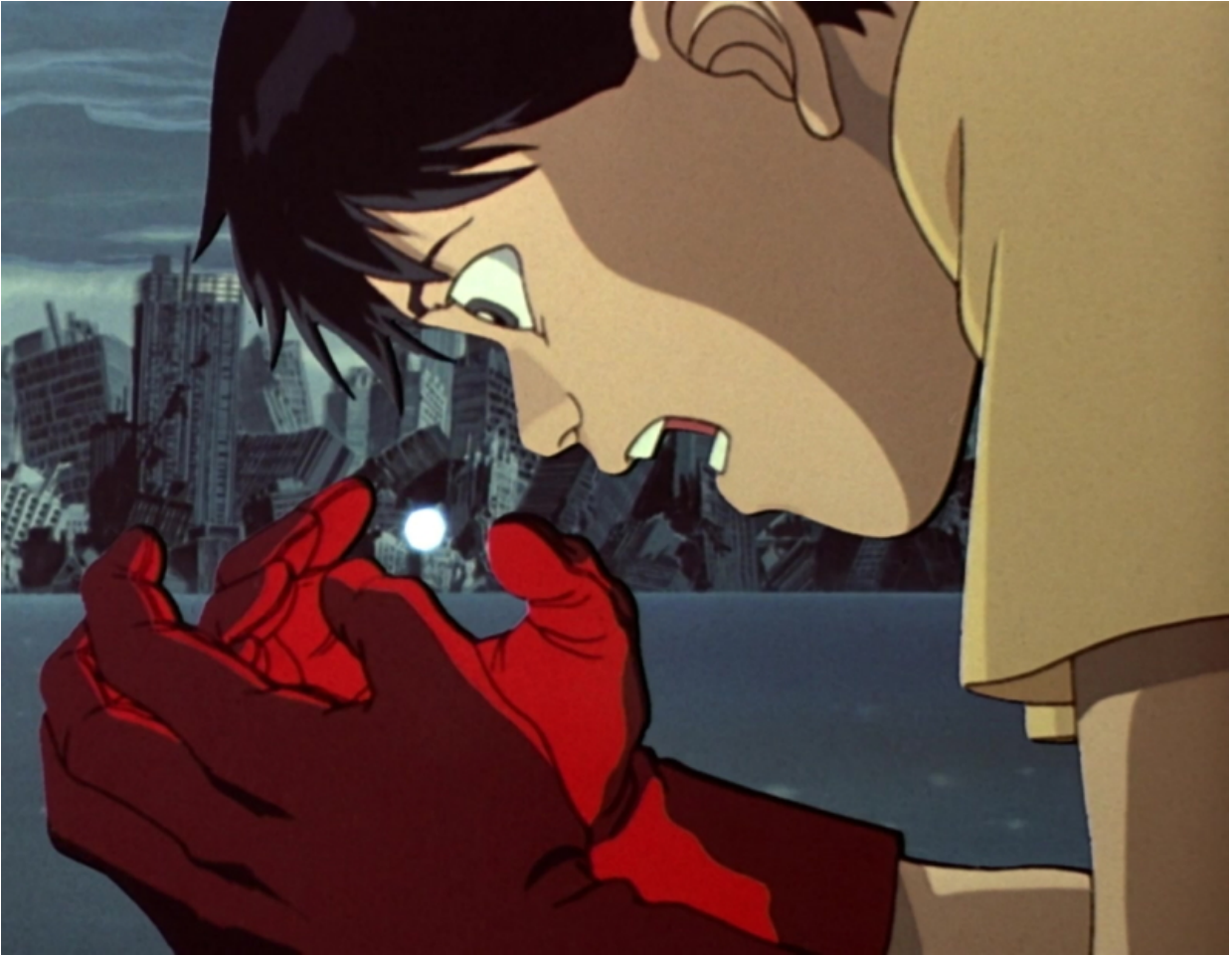




Encapsulating the movie's denouement in a single blink-and-you'll-miss-it clip of Kaneda catching an orb was never going to cut it. Then again, what *would*? How do you accurately transpose the ethereal experience of being transported into a

celestial, indescribable vortex? It's doubtful ICE had a \$9m budget or an army of talented animators at their disposal.

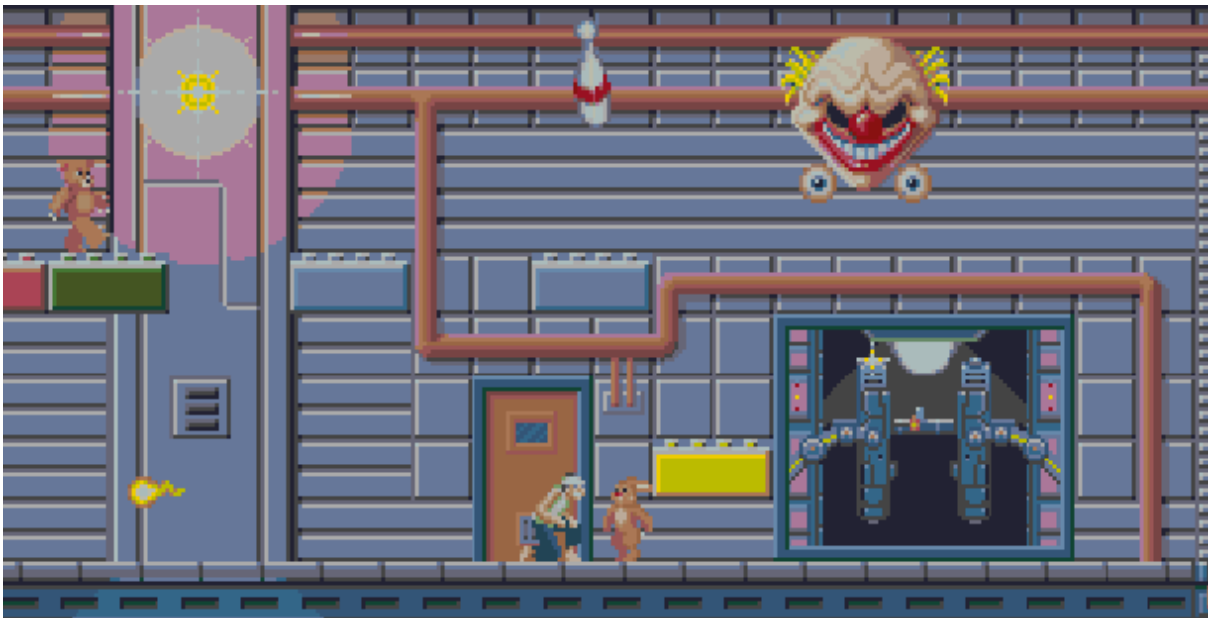




Regardless, I think it's safe to say this wasn't exactly the gaming companion fans of the movie had waited seven years for. A property this open to interpretation could have been

moulded to suit any genre, bankrolled by invaluable experience gleaned from a bottomless back-catalogue of Amiga triumphs and failures. It's a real shame since the foundations were a true gift, bow-tied with a ready-made appreciative international audience.

ICE didn't get *everything* wrong despite what the magazines would have you believe. I don't know how anyone can look at the graphics and honestly claim they're atrocious. Sure the quality is variable, with the final level really letting the side down. Elsewhere I think the cute, cartoony style and pastel colour palette is quite endearing, if not entirely appropriate to the hard-edged, risqué subject matter.



It's just like the Killer of Caerbannog in rabbit's cloth... oh wait, never mind.

There's no mistaking what the digitised interval screens aim to depict - they're as complimentary a recreation as the system would allow, neatly evoking the relevant scenes from the manga.

Tim Bartlett's music raises the bar too. It's atmospheric and brooding in a subtle way that's comfortable remaining in the background, forgetting that the end of the world is imminently to land on our doorstep. 'Kaneda' from the movie's soundtrack by Geinoh Yamashirogumi appears to have been used as a template for the very glockenspiely title music. At a stretch, I can also detect a few bars from 'Battle Against Clown', only minus all the heavy chant-panting (I cut most of that from the beginning). You're unlikely to have heard anything like it. Bizarre and brilliant in equal measure!

Certainly preferable to the basic sound effects that will optionally play only in isolation. Ridiculous in 1994 that we had to select one or the other, with no option to hear both simultaneously. Developers had long since overcome that technical audio impediment.



While the CD32 version enhances the package slightly with brief digitised level intermission clips (as opposed to stills), music and sound effects sampled from the cartoon, the core design, controls and mechanics remain identical. As a

baseline, we would have expected the impractical controls to be fixed given the advantages offered by the console's multi-button joypad. I'd happily have traded in the complimentary collector's edition t-shirt and badge for that disappointingly rare USP.

It was a crazy long-shot hoping this would tip the balance, distracting players from the realisation that they'd been foisted with a slapdash, cookie-cutter cash-in peppered with lazy spelling, punctuation and word-spacing mistakes.

Several years ago 'Hardcore Gaming 101' writer, John Sczepaniak, attempted to contact the developers who regrettably gave birth to Akira for the Amiga to find out how it all went so horribly wrong (assuming that's the general consensus). You won't be shocked to discover that they either couldn't explain, or weren't keen to discuss, what has to be the low-light of their collective careers.